

## Leo Strauss on Thomas Hobbes and Plato: Two Previously Unpublished Lectures

### **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, there has been a considerable increase of interest in the thought and writings of Leo Strauss. This renewed interest has led to the discovery and publication of writings and lectures which heretofore have been available only to few scholars. The following two recently discovered lectures on Plato's *Republic* (1958) and Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1962) were originally delivered by Leo Strauss in the *Works of the Mind* lecture series at the University of Chicago.

of the Mind” lecture series at the University of Chicago. The transcript of the lectures is based on three transcripts, which the editor has been able to obtain from various sources. None of the lectures was edited by Strauss for the purposes of publication. The lecture on Plato has only one typescript that indicates that the lecture was given sometime in December 1958. The lecture on Hobbes has two different typescripts that overlap precisely; the only difference is that one of the transcripts includes the question-and-answer section. The transcripts indicate that the lecture was given on April 27, 1962, and it is safe to say that this lecture reflects Strauss’s mature reflections on Hobbes because all of his major writings on Hobbes precede this lecture.

The original typescripts of these lectures will be included in the Leo Strauss Papers at Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. In my transcript, book titles are standardized, a few grammatical errors are corrected, and endnotes are used to provide relevant information and to identify Strauss’s references. The numbers in square brackets represent the page numbers in the transcripts.

### Works of the Mind Lecture on Plato’s *Republic*

[1] The subject matter of Plato’s *Republic* is justice. Socrates raises the question “What is justice?” and answers it. Despite this, the *Republic* is not a treatise but a dialog. This means that in trying to understand the *Republic* one must consider not only the content of the book but the form as well. We cannot help, even in such a provisional discussion, raising the question as to what is the purpose of the dialog as such. Plato has answered this question in the *Phaedrus*, and we can summarize his answer as follows: A dialog is a writing that is free from the defects of writings. What is the essential defect of writing according to Plato? A writing, Socrates says, is a speech that says the same thing to everyone. That, of course, in a sense is not true. We all know that the same speech, the same writing, says very different things to different readers. But Socrates does not have in mind this unintended manifoldness of meanings that writings have. A writing as writing is meant to convey a single meaning regardless of what

### Editorial Note

The following two previously unpublished lectures were originally delivered by Leo Strauss in the “Works

will happen to the writing accidentally. According to Socrates, or to Plato, it is wrong to say the same thing about important matters to everyone, and the dialog was devised to avoid this evil. How then is this defect cured by the dialog? We start from the observation that it is easier to hear what people say than to see what they are talking about and how they are talking. And the speeches are easier to “get” than the deeds, and yet the deeds mean everything not said by the speakers—the speakers’ characters, the situation in which they meet, and so on. And yet, on the other hand, the deeds are more trustworthy [and] less ambiguous than the speeches. If this is so, it becomes necessary to understand the speeches in the light of the deeds, to understand the audible in the light of the inaudible. The speeches, however general, for example, dealing with justice in general, occur always in Plato in particular settings. The individual (i.e., Socrates) is talking to these and these other individuals mentioned by name at this particular time, in this particular locality, under these other particular circumstances. To get Plato’s universal or abstract teaching, one must enucleate what Socrates says in these particular situations. One must enucleate from that the universal. And this is possible only by the careful consideration of the particulars. Plato has indicated the general rule that we must follow. He speaks in the same section of the *Phaedrus* of “logographic necessity,” of the necessity governing the writing of speeches.<sup>14</sup> In a perfect speech, according to Plato, there is nothing superfluous. Just as in a living being every part fulfills a function for the good life of the whole, in a perfect speech every part, however seemingly trivial, fulfills a necessary function for the good work of the writing, of the written speech. The function of the well-written speech is to make the reader think. Every part of the speech, every part of the Platonic dialog fulfills this function, provided we consider it, provided we think about it. This much in the way of a general introduction; now let us turn to the *Republic*.

The *Republic* is a conversation [on] justice taking place in specific circumstances. In the first place, the place where the conversation takes place is the Piraeus, the harbor of Athens, the scene of Athens’s naval and commercial power. From Plato’s point of view this great development of Athenian naval and commercial power was a decay. We are not in old Athens, the Athens that won the battles of Marathon and Salamis. We live in a [2] period of decay. Connected with this is the fact that the dialog takes place in the house of a foreigner, of a metic, of a man who is not an Athenian citizen proper. The old severe

order of the city has become impaired. And the third point we may mention in this connection is the occasion. The occasion on which the conversation takes place is the introduction of a new worship, a new form of worship, we might say of a new god, into Athens: innovation, decay of the old order. This is then the condition in which the question of justice is raised. The interlocutors mentioned by name are ten, ten men in the Piraeus. There had been a reaction against what Plato had regarded as the excessive democracy after the end of the Peloponnesian War, the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, in which a relative of Plato had played a considerable role. At that time there were ten men in the Piraeus. Ten in the Piraeus, we can say, stands for the reaction against this decay. But if we would look more closely at these characters mentioned by name, we would see that quite a few of them (e.g., Polemarchus) had become victims of this reaction. We are not here in a situation in which a political reaction is in any way recommended. The basis of the dialog is the experience of the failure of that reaction. The reconstruction of the healthy city will take place not on the political plane at all but on a different plane. This much we may expect from the very beginning of the dialog. But I have not yet considered the very beginning of the dialog.

You remember this scene: Socrates is rushing home, rushing to Athens, from the Piraeus. He has prayed to the goddess; he has done his duty, and he has nothing else to do in that scene of evil, the Piraeus, and he is running home. He is kept back, however, partly by force (Polemarchus threatens him) and partly by persuasion (Adeimantus promises him a wonderful show if he will stay, and even a dinner later on). This scene ends as follows:

After dinner we will get up, said Polemarchus, and go out and see the sights and meet a lot of the lads there and have good talk. So stay, and do as we ask.

It looks as if we should have to stay, said Glaucon.

If this is the general opinion, said Socrates, we must act in this manner.<sup>15</sup>

We have here a prelude to the discussion of justice. Force [is] somewhere in the background, but also is persuasion. Agreement is reached among everyone except Socrates that they should stay. Socrates, as a just and sensible man, abides by the decision of everyone but him. This is the prelude of the dialog.

We see another point already from this beginning. This conversation on justice as we have it would never have taken place without some degree of

compulsion. Socrates was kept back by some force represented partly by Polemarchus and partly by Glaucon. The dialog, the conversation on justice, is not an entirely spontaneous dialog. By a spontaneous dialog I mean a conversation that Socrates himself seeks. This conversation is to some extent imposed on Socrates. The dinner that they were promised and the big show, the torch race on horseback, do not take place, at least as far as we, the readers of the *Republic*, are concerned. We do not get the dinner. We are undergoing a training by not receiving the dinner: a training in self-control regarding food. The *Republic* is a very ascetic or austere dialog that shows itself in what is happening to [3] those present. Also the wonderful sight—this procession—does not come off as far as the hearers are concerned. They do not get any sights; they get something to listen to. They are feasted by a speech.

The *Republic* consists obviously of two parts: a negative or destructive part and a positive or constructive part. The negative or destructive part is Book I, and the positive or constructive part is Books II–X. In Book I Socrates refutes certain opinions regarding justice. These are false opinions. In fact, they are *the* false opinions regarding justice. By understanding their falsity, we realize already the outlines of the positive part. Needless to say, I for one could not have realized that before having read the positive part too. But it is Plato's art that we can afterward see that the whole structure developed in the positive part is already implied in the sufficiently understood first part (i.e., Book I). Now let us remind ourselves briefly of the three definitions of justice, these false definitions that are given in Book I. The first definition may be said to be that justice is simply honesty, to pay one's debts and not to lie. The second definition is to help one's friends and to hurt one's enemies. And the third and last: justice is the advantage of the stronger. The first definition is suggested by Cephalus, the father. The second definition is given by Polemarchus, Cephalus's son. And the third definition is given by Thrasymachus, a teacher of rhetoric. Now the first definition, justice is honesty in the sense defined—to pay one's debts and not to lie—is obviously a good statement regarding justice, at least of what we all think of primarily when we say a man is just. But the second and third answers are not impressive as statements that call for immediate assent. They are based on some sophistication, on a false sophistication as it appears. Yet Polemarchus, one of the two men who gives such a falsely sophisticated answer to the question of what justice is, is not only the son and

heir of Cephalus's wealth he is also the heir of Cephalus's assertion or speech. By this remark Socrates indicates<sup>16</sup> that the second definition, justice consists in helping one's friends and hurting one's enemies, is necessarily connected with the first and obvious definition, that justice is honesty. We must try to understand that. But first let us look very briefly at the argument regarding the first definition.

Justice consists, in the first place, of paying one's debts. But there is a question about deposits, a form of debt. It is unjust to return deposits if the deposit is a gun and the former depositor is now insane. It is unjust to return the gun to him, obviously. But the other part of the first definition—that justice consists in not lying—is not discussed at all and hence is not refuted. Now we see here the connection with the positive part. You know that later on, in a crucial section, it is asserted that the best city, the perfectly just city, requires what is called a noble lie. That means it is just to lie in a certain manner, a white lie of the highest order is required by justice. If that is so, it cannot be true that justice consists simply in not lying. This silence about not lying right at the beginning foreshadows the later discussion about the noble lie.

Now let us look at the second definition. Justice consists in helping one's friends and hurting one's enemies. This definition is refuted, and [4] the conclusion is that justice consists in not hurting anyone. A just man would not hurt anyone. One could wonder at this point whether this is good enough. Is a man who never hurts anyone but also never helps anyone a just man? Would we not have to go on from here and say justice consists indeed in not hurting anyone but also in helping everyone as far as we can? Would it not be sensible then to say that justice fully understood consists in human kindness? But we know (if we have read on) that this cannot be the answer given in Plato's *Republic* because the ruling part in Plato's best city, the guardians, are men who must imitate dogs. Dogs are characterized by the fact that they are kind to their acquaintances and rather vicious to strangers. This is maintained throughout the *Republic*. Now if this harshness to strangers is essential to the most just city, justice simply cannot be identical with charity, human kindness, or whatever it may be. These two points that we have considered now—(1) not lying, (2) justice is not hurting enemies and helping friends—come together in the statement on the noble lie in the following way: The noble lie consists partly in the assertion that the citizens of the perfect city have been educated and reared beneath the earth.

This is an obvious falsehood that must be taught for certain reasons; the reason is that they all must believe that they have the same mother, and thus they will be brothers among themselves. The brotherhood of men requires, according to this scheme at least, that there is a common mother, and this common mother is the earth. But while the statement of this part of the noble lie is made, Socrates makes the subtle change from earth to country, from *gē* to *chōra*.<sup>17</sup> And so he says: you are brothers because you are all sons of the same country. He replaced the natural kinship of all men by a fictitious natural kinship, by a merely proclaimed natural kinship of the citizens of a given political society. Not all men are brothers but only all fellow citizens are brothers, and from here we understand the strange definition of justice given by Polemarchus. What Polemarchus is driving at, perhaps without knowing it, is that the notion that justice is patriotism, is identical with being friendly to one's fellow citizens and being harsh to strangers. Justice is patriotism, but nothing but patriotism. But as such, and within these limits, it is dedication to the common good, to the common good of this particular city, of this particular civil society. Justice means indeed full dedication to others, to be a slave to others as Plato says somewhere,<sup>18</sup> but to the other members of the community or to your polis. Honesty is not enough; one must be public-spirited, one must be fully patriotic. This is then the second common notion about justice which is discussed, and in a way disposed of, in the first book of the *Republic*. To repeat: the first defines justice as honesty; the second defines justice as public-spiritedness, full dedication to the common good of this or that particular society to which one happens to belong. I mention the fact that this definition of Polemarchus is the second or central definition. As will appear later, Polemarchus is very close to Socrates; he is much closer to Socrates than Cephalus on the one hand and Thrasymachus on the other. And in a certain critical situation in the first book, it is Polemarchus who defends Socrates. And now if we look forward to the positive part of the *Republic*, we see that this definition—justice is dedication to the common good of this particular society—is not only never questioned, it is even *the* principle from which all institutions, or almost all institutions, characteristic of Plato's best polis necessarily follow.

[5] I turn now to the third definition, the definition given by Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus puts the cart before the horse. He is a somewhat strange character, and he obviously loves to shock. So he states the most shocking implication of his view of justice before he

has stated the perfectly sensible starting point of his contention. He never states really this sensible starting point, but at a certain moment his conversation with Socrates is quasi-interrupted by Polemarchus on the one hand and Cleitophon, a friend or pupil of Thrasymachus, on the other. It is a brief section consisting of seven speeches, which I shall call the intermezzo. Now from this brief discussion it appears that justice is here understood as consisting in obeying the rulers. In any orderly society obeying the rulers means ultimately obeying the law, because the rulers themselves are supposed to obey the law. The view of justice from which Thrasymachus starts is then best described as follows: Justice is identical with legality or law-abidingness. To show how Thrasymachus's official and explicit thesis derives from this simple, commonsensical assertion that justice is identical with law-abidingness, the following reflection suffices: In every political society the law is made, of course, by the lawmaker or lawmakers. Who the lawmaker is depends, as we say, on the constitution, on the political order of the society. In a monarchy it would be a king; in a democracy it would be the citizen body assembled or duly represented. The law always reflects the opinions and the wishes of the ruling body. The ruling body could very well be the majority of the citizens; that is one special case. Thrasymachus then asserts there is not and cannot be a ruling body that does not establish the laws with a view to its convenience, with a view to its interest or advantage. So that if we are just in obeying the laws, we are in fact doing what is to the advantage, actual or presumed, of the rulers. But whatever we may think of that analysis, the starting point of Thrasymachus is commonsensical, something that we all mean also when we ordinarily speak of the just man: justice is legality or law-abidingness. One could perhaps say that this definition—justice is law-abidingness—is perhaps even more evident to begin with than the reply given by Cephalus according to which justice is identical with honesty. There can be conflicts between law-abidingness and honesty, and our primary inclination might very well be to say: "In case of doubt, obey the law rather than follow your views of honesty." One could say more than that: The reply that justice is identical with legality or law-abidingness *is* the first opinion because it is the most authoritative opinion. It is the opinion of the polis. The polis defines justice as consisting in obeying the laws of the polis. Now when we read the speeches of Thrasymachus and his exchange with Socrates, we must not only listen to Thrasymachus we must also [...]

[Tape changed]

[...] Plato<sup>19</sup> steps forth and guarantees the payment for the fine. Moreover, Thrasymachus in his discussion with Socrates forbids to Socrates certain answers. The term “forbidding” occurs more than once in the Greek text: Thrasymachus is someone who forbids to say certain things; He is an authority. In a word, he is the polis; he acts or plays the polis. Acting the polis, and the polis appears primarily as the forbidding thing, Thrasymachus gives the definition of justice, which is most clearly that [6] of the polis, namely, obey the law of the polis and do not appeal from the polis to any higher authority.

We have then discerned three definitions of justice underlying the explicit definitions given in the first book: Justice is honesty; Justice is public-spiritedness or patriotism; Justice is legality. We can say that these are *the* three pre-philosophic or ordinary opinions on justice existing in every society. Of these three definitions, only the second one, namely, the definition according to which justice is public-spiritedness or patriotism is preserved to some extent in the later argument. And this definition, to repeat, is the central definition. We can say this definition, which on the most superficial level reads “justice consists in helping friends and hurting enemies,” but applied to the polis it means justice consists in helping the fellow citizens and in hurting the strangers or the potential or actual enemies of the city, is preserved and is even the key to the positive definition of justice given in the *Republic*. For what is the positive teaching of the *Republic*? The complete subordination of the individual to the city, the complete subordination of what is proper and peculiar to one to the common—the most extreme statement of the principle of patriotism. Communism in the sense in which Plato means it goes much beyond what is now called communism and is in fact absolute communism. It is communism not only regarding property but regarding women and children as well. This positive structure of the *Republic*, of the best city of the *Republic*, can more simply perhaps be understood by starting from the first definition (i.e., justice is honesty) or to use the traditional definition of justice, justice is a constant and perpetual will of assigning or leaving to everyone what belongs to him. This definition is not discussed by Plato explicitly, but an implicit discussion is present, as can easily be seen from the following consideration: Justice is said to consist in giving everyone his due. But what is a man’s due? What the law says is his. But what if the law is unjust in the first place? Then by being formally just, you are substantively

unjust. This definition can be maintained, then, only if we say justice consists in giving everyone that which is truly his, that which is his by nature and not merely by positive enactment or by convention. This again leads to the doctrine of the *Republic*, justice consists in assigning to everyone those goods and those functions that are best for him and therefore best for the community. This principle, strictly understood, is incompatible of course with private property, because the legal heir to a fortune may be morally ruined by the possession of that fortune and would be much better off if he were to do some useful work in a mine perhaps. Moreover, if this is true, if justice consists in assigning to everyone those goods and those functions that are best for him, for which he is best fitted, then the rulers must be absolute rulers. Moreover, they must be rulers who are truly wise, who are the best judges of what is good for the soul of each of their subjects. They must be physicians of the soul, able to judge what is good for the soul just as physicians are the best judges of what is good for the body. The absolute communism and the rule of the wise men are implied in this simple reflection.

In the first book we have these three definitions and therefore these three parts: the Cephalus part, the Polemarchus part, and the Thrasymachus [7] part. But if we look, we see that the Polemarchus part is the central section. And I have explained why it deserves to be central. But if we look at the *Republic* as a whole, it is not Polemarchus who is at the center but Thrasymachus. I remind you of the fact that from Book II on there are two interlocutors who control the scene almost everywhere, Glaucon and Adeimantus. So we have first a couple (father and son), then Thrasymachus, and then the two brothers. In the light of the *Republic* as a whole, Thrasymachus is the central figure. I will try to explain in what sense Thrasymachus is the center. I have said that he states the most obvious thesis of the polis regarding justice (i.e., justice is identical with legality). And by his conduct he is described in a way as representing the polis, nay, being the polis. There are two later scenes in which Thrasymachus comes to sight and reveals the true significance of that man. The first is at the beginning of the fifth book. Here a scene at the beginning of the *Republic* is repeated. Someone is touching someone on the shoulder and dragging him to him just as it happened at the beginning. Just as the scene at the beginning culminated in a kind of vote, where Socrates said: If it is the common opinion, the opinion of all of you, we must abide by that. The second scene also culminates in a vote. The most striking



difference between these two voting scenes is this: In the first book Thrasymachus was not yet present as a voter. In the second scene (at the beginning of the fifth book) Thrasymachus also contributes his vote. At the beginning of the *Republic*, before the conversation starts, we have a kind of germinal society or polis to which Thrasymachus does not belong. By the beginning of the fifth book, after the building up of the just city has already well advanced, Thrasymachus has become integrated into the polis. This great work, the perfect and just city, built up in the *Republic* requires that Thrasymachus find his place in it somehow. What is that place? What is that function? In the sixth book we receive the answer. At a certain moment someone is trying to stir up a quarrel between Socrates and Thrasymachus. And Socrates says: "Do not stir up that quarrel. We have become friends just now while we have never been enemies." They have never been enemies, but their relation has changed just now toward one of friendship. What has happened? We have to consider what happened just now to understand what induces Socrates to say we have now become friends. The context is this: At this point we have understood or learned all the features of the best polis—absolute communism plus the rule of philosophers. And we have learned that the best city stands and falls by the rule of the philosophers. But how is this possible? Is it not absurd to demand of a citizen body that it should submit to the rule of such strange people, the philosophers? The answer given there by Socrates is that it is possible. The many can be persuaded to submit to the rule of philosophers. The many are not as bad as these reactionaries like Glaucon and Adeimantus say. Now what is persuasion? Persuasion is an activity that can be transformed into an art. The art of persuasion is rhetoric, and Thrasymachus was an outstanding teacher of rhetoric. Without the use of the art of Thrasymachus the rule of the philosophers would be absolutely impossible, and therefore Thrasymachus symbolically represents the belongingness of rhetoric in the best city. Yet we learn gradually, when we go on and follow the argument, that persuasion is not as strong and effective as it appears to be in these remarks of the sixth book. It appears, for reasons that are not given [8] but reasons that are not too difficult to understand, that it is not sufficient that the philosophers rule this perfectly communist society. Before the philosophers can begin to rule, they must expel the whole citizen body, in fact everyone older than ten. Only those younger than ten may remain in the city because they are still young enough to be molded by the philosophers. As

for those older than ten, that is hopeless. Even the best rhetoric and the most perfect progressive education could not change them. We, as reasonable readers, as politically serious people, must raise the question: Is this still a possible political suggestion? Is it imaginable that any citizen body, which has not lost its bearings completely and does see its way to survival, might conceivably submit to the rule of a philosopher or to philosophers? But they would not submit, I believe, to the rule of philosophers with this string attached to it—that they are driven out of the city and rusticated for the rest of their days, and the philosophers permitted to rule their children. Persuasion cannot have this great power. And to indicate this limited power of persuasion, two examples are sufficient. First, Socrates's own fate: he was unable to persuade the city of Athens to acquit him of the charge of which he was accused; and the comical aspect of the same thing: Socrates was unable, despite his great power of persuasion, to rule his own wife. If, then, the power of persuasion is not as great as it is presented for a moment at the peak of the argument of the *Republic*, the conclusion follows inevitably that the best city as described in the *Republic* is not possible. And this is confirmed by a number of other considerations.

I would like to add a few more points. Nevertheless, despite the fact that this complicated roundabout way through that communist city ruled by philosophers is not a possible political suggestion, the *Republic* does contain Plato's or Socrates's answer to the question about what justice is. And this answer is given explicitly: Justice consists in minding one's own business, in doing one's own work, with this qualification to which only an allusion is made: Justice consists in doing one's work *well*. This means justice consists in doing well the work of man as man. And man as man is the thinking being. Justice, therefore, consists essentially and primarily in thinking. As the Socratic formula is, virtue is knowledge. While justice in the strict sense is not possible in the polis and for the polis, it is possible in the case of the individual. Now this has one great implication. The best city as described in the *Republic*, if possible, would be self-sufficient. It would not be in need of other cities except accidentally. It would be concerned entirely with its own goodness and improvement. It would not serve other cities. But the parallelism between the best city and the best man implies that the same is true of the best human individuals. They are self-sufficient in the sense that their justice consists exclusively in their self-improvement. For them there is no compulsion.

They do what they spontaneously do, and this distinction between the voluntary and compulsory on this level is incidentally the basis of the distinction between voluntary or spontaneous and compulsory dialogs to which I referred before. You recall the passage in the *Republic* about the philosopher's going down to the cave (which is compulsory); Glaucon is for a moment feeling that this is a great injustice to the philosophers, that they are compelled to go down to the cave again—to which Socrates replies that it is not unjust in this case because our [9] best polis, this allegedly perfect polis, has enabled them to dedicate themselves to philosophy. But the application to cities other than the best is obvious. In the world as it always was and as it always will be, the return to the cave of the practical or ordinary life is not justly inflicted on the philosophers.

The *Republic* in its presentation of the just city can very well be called a utopia in the common sense of the term. It describes an order that the author knew was impossible, incompatible with the nature of man. A closer study of the philosophic teaching proper of the *Republic* would show that the *Republic* is not only a political utopia but a philosophic utopia as well. The whole political scheme of the *Republic* as presented there is based on the premise that knowledge of the highest theme, what is called the good or the idea of the good, is available. It is possible, I think, to show that Plato did not believe this is true. The description in the *Republic* of philosophy at its peak is in its way as utopian as the description given in the *Republic* of the polis at its best. We may say the *Republic* as a whole is based on a deliberate overestimation of the power of the human mind. And a consequence of this is the overestimation of the power of persuasion of which we have noted some traces: the overestimation of persuasion, or negatively expressed, the underestimation of the power of force, of bodily force. The power of the body is recognized in the *Republic* to some extent. The body is *the* limit to communism. Everything can be communized—houses, fields, even thoughts as is very well known today in the age of super-propaganda; but the body, its feelings and sensations, cannot be communized. No one can feel another man's toothache, to say nothing of other things. Despite the fact that the body is recognized in the *Republic* throughout as the limit of communism, it is nevertheless true to say that it is characteristic of the *Republic*, not of other dialogs of Plato, that it is based to some extent on an abstraction from the body. I mention only one example, although I cannot elaborate it: the

treatment of the two sexes in the *Republic* is a clear proof of this disregard of the body. Therefore, the question of man becomes in the *Republic* the question of the human soul alone. Plato speaks in the *Republic* of the tri-partition of the soul: reason, spiritedness, and desire. A similar tri-partition occurs in the dialog with *Phaedrus*, where the soul is compared to a charioteer, to horses, and a chariot. The chariot is the body. The chariot does not occur in the *Republic*. The question of man, of the unity of man, becomes, therefore, in the *Republic* the question of the human soul, of the unity of the human soul. There is reason and there is the subrational part. The bond, the unifying bond between reason and the lower part, is called in the *Republic* the spiritedness. Spiritedness, anger, indignation, however we might call it, is that which justifies the unity of man. To understand that one has to consider the fact that in the *Republic*, as distinguished again from the other Platonic dialogs, eros, desire, love, is depreciated in a very extreme way. Only one point can be mentioned here: The tyrant, injustice incarnate, is presented as eros incarnate. From here we can understand that the descent to the cave, meaning the descent of the philosopher from the contemplation of the truth to living with other human beings, is in the *Republic* presented as due only to compulsion, precisely because the power of eros is here denied. The philosopher is presented here as [10] unnaturally self-sufficient. He is not in need of potential philosophers; therefore, he can only be compelled by exterior force to return to the cave. The problem to which we are led by this observation is this: What is the connection between the fact that the *Republic* is a utopia in this extreme sense, that it is both a philosophic and political utopia, and the high praise, the unusually high praise of spiritedness, which I will now loosely translate as moral indignation? The philosophic and political utopia of the *Republic* mean this: Man is presented as possessing a much greater freedom, freedom from the body in particular, than he actually possesses. The *Republic* suggests that it depends on man's free choice entirely what way of life he chooses—the scene at the end in the myth of Er. Man is infinitely responsible. That is the implication of the utopia. If man is infinitely responsible, the power of moral indignation regarding human imperfection is proportionally increased. The utopian character of the *Republic* and the emphasis on spiritedness, anger, moral indignation, are inseparable from each other.



I must leave it at these remarks, although I want to make it clear that the point toward which I was working is this: Realizing the impossibility from Plato's point of view of the best political order as presented in the *Republic*, we are entitled to call the *Republic* a utopia in the sense defined. The *Republic* is a utopia not only politically but philosophically as well. This is its unique characteristic among Plato's writings. On the other hand, the characteristic of the *Republic* compared with the other Platonic writings is the depreciation of eros, of love, and the corresponding promotion of spiritedness, anger, indignation, or however we might translate it. The question would then be: How are these two striking characteristics of the *Republic* connected with each other? For it is safe to assume in every Platonic dialog that there is a necessary connection between its various elements.

### Works of the Mind Lecture on Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*

[1] The English *Leviathan* is Hobbes's most famous book. It is, however, not in every respect the most perfect presentation of Hobbes's political philosophy. There are three other works: *The Elements of Law*, *De Cive* or *Of The Citizen*, and the Latin version of the *Leviathan*. The *Leviathan* contains the most comprehensive presentation of Hobbes's political teaching, but it is not considered in every respect the most perfect one. Regarding the foundation one derives great help from the *Elements of Law* and from *The Citizen*, which one does not get from the *Leviathan*. Hobbes apparently made four successive attempts to present one and the same political teaching and he was not entirely satisfied with either. There is no question, I think, of the development of Hobbes's thought. There is also an external consideration why one has to consider the other writings: The *Leviathan* is the only presentation of Hobbes's teaching published while England was a republic (i.e., at a time when there were no heresy laws) so that Hobbes was not punishable for the many heresies that he did in fact commit in the English *Leviathan*. The proof is that when he brought it out in Latin translation after England had become a kingdom again, he deleted some of the most obnoxious and heretical passages of the English *Leviathan*. At the same time, however, in an appendix to the Latin translation, he made things in a way worse by retracting explicitly some of the heretical remarks; but by retracting them he drew, of course, attention to them. And I often wondered how this

concern with security was compatible with the frankness in his later years. I believe the reason is that when he was in his seventies and did not aspire any longer to a very grand life on earth, he became in a way more courageous than he had ever been in his more flourishing years. However this may be, one must consider Hobbes's other writings because of certain defects that the *Leviathan*, despite all its great perfection, contains.

I shall first speak of the time limits of Hobbes. There are people who believe that the history of political philosophy presents to us a fight between good and evil, between right and might. On the side of right we find, of course, Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Locke, Mill, and John Dewey; on the side of might we find the sophists, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Nietzsche. Now, Hobbes's *Leviathan* is here especially important because it is the only English writing by a black sheep. And the English-speaking nations, especially the British themselves, are of course least open to this kind of thought, but it reflects the exclusive distinction of Hobbes that we must observe. Now, while this distinction and orientation is not tenable at closer inspection, it is nevertheless not entirely misleading; there is some truth in this superficial opinion. To understand, however, the issue somewhat better I want to start from this fact that Hobbes surely belongs to the decent tradition because he is a teacher of natural law. You have seen this natural law teaching in chapters xvi and xvii of the *Leviathan*, which must be remembered not merely for historical but for practical reasons. Yet it is also true that Hobbes modified the traditional natural law teaching radically.

In the classical presentation of the natural law teaching that you find in Thomas Aquinas, there are three natural inclinations of man: the inclination to self-preservation, the inclination to the preservation of the species and to social life [2] as such, and the natural inclination toward knowledge, in particular knowledge of God. Hobbes drops the higher natural inclinations—the natural inclination to society and the natural inclination to knowledge altogether—and retains only the natural inclination to self-preservation. This is, of course, crucial: he preserves only the lowest with the understanding that this is also the strongest, that on whose active power you can always count. He counts and abets that natural law school that was consciously, if not always openly, building on what is believed to be a low but solid ground and that had a great effect on the modern century. This impression is confirmed by Hobbes's argument: If the fundamental phenomenon is the desire for self-

preservation, or, negatively expressed, the fear of death, then man has by nature the right to everything conducive to self-preservation, to every means for his self-preservation. Then, however, the question arises: who can judge what is a good mean for self-preservation? The traditional answer would have been a man of wisdom and virtue. Hobbes says no, every man is a judge. This means that beyond the raw judgment of each no appeal is possible. The consequence, as Hobbes develops it, is the war of everyone against everyone, and this war that is incompatible with self-preservation, demands that everyone surrender all his power, especially his judgment regarding the means for self-preservation, to the government, the public reason as distinguished from the private reason. The government must then be absolute and preferably, in Hobbes's view, an absolute monarchy.

There is one massive difficulty to which Hobbes's deduction is exposed: Is it clear that the fear of violent death is the strongest passion? There was, in Hobbes's time more clearly visible than it is today, a great competitor with the fear of violent death, and that was the fear of hell, divine punishment after death. This had great importance on a practical, political plane because the earthly administrator, if I may say so, of divine punishment is the Church and if you say that the fear of hell is more important than the fear of natural death, then you say, in effect, that the Church has a higher status than the State. Hobbes's construction demands, therefore, the rejection of the claims of the Church, the rejection ultimately of the seriousness of the danger of hell. This even requires that the fear of powers invisible—meaning, of spiritual<sup>20</sup> powers—becomes smaller than the fear of violent death (i.e., the fear of human beings), especially those who are the government. In other words, Hobbes's scheme requires the enlightenment of the citizen body and the enlightenment of the ruler. The absolute government must be enlightened and enlightening. But we must note here one point: the absolute character of the government and the enlightened character of the government have a very different status. There is no question that the government must be absolute. This can be enforced very simply by certain well-known institutions. The enlightenment does not have this institutional certainty; the enlightenment remains a pious hope. Therefore, the successors of Hobbes were dissatisfied with his conclusions and said the government must not be absolute but must be responsible to the governed—freedom must be preserved. But freedom means here precisely this: the raw judgment of each must be preserved, that raw judgment that

Hobbes demanded be handed over to the government. Each must remain as free under government as he was in the state of nature. The practical means of that is universal suffrage. More precisely, each must have a stake in the making of the laws to which he is subject. Rousseau thought that this presented no difficulty because in the act of legislation in a direct democracy the raw judgment of each is automatically transformed into something like a rational judgment. To take a simple example: we don't want to pay taxes (our raw judgment); then you go into the assembly and suggest that there be a law abolishing taxes. Then you begin to [3] realize that you yourself would suffer by this and therefore your raw judgment by being put into the form of a universal general law ceases to impress you and becomes rational.

Differently stated: The enlightened despot was replaced after Hobbes by the enlightened people. Everyone is supposed to be enlightened and enlightenable and, therefore, no longer in need of the enlightened despotism suggested by Hobbes. In other words, education is a condition for civic virtue. But what kind of education?

I have now almost reached our age and will restate the problem: Just as in the case of the absolute monarchy of Hobbes where the absoluteness of the government was guaranteed but its enlightened character was not, now in the case of liberal democracy also the procedure is guaranteed—free elections and all the other paraphernalia—but the enlightenment, the public spiritedness, the spirit, is not. Now, if we look back to Hobbes where the raw judgment of each is the starting point (as it is also today), the raw judgment of each led to absolute government as the only corrective for the chaos caused by raw judgment, now also the raw judgment of each becomes sacrosanct according to a very powerful version of present-day theory. What confronts the raw judgment is meant to be something that we can describe as institutions without teeth in them. Liberal democracy becomes before our eyes permissive egalitarianism. This I think is the true political crisis of our age. To understand this, we must go back to Hobbes who provided the outline of this problem, although he provides a solution unacceptable to us, but that serves as a kind of model for all later solutions. So, Hobbes is timely.

But I will now turn from these difficult matters, which also engender passions once one thinks about them in greater detail, and speak first briefly about the peculiarities of Hobbes. If we simply read and study Hobbes, without looking at present-day problems, what are Hobbes's peculiarities? This question

cannot be answered without knowing the other political philosophers, especially those who preceded him. I want to give a general answer to this question, and you might check it against the impression you get from your reading so that we can discuss it later on. Let me read to you a passage from Hobbes's earlier writing, *The Elements of Law*, the chapter on the passions:

The comparison of the life of man to a race, though it holdeth not in every point, yet it holdeth so well for this our purpose, that we may thereby both see and remember almost all the passions before mentioned. But this race we must suppose to have no other goal, nor other garland, but being foremost; and in it: To endeavour, is appetite. To be remiss, is sensuality. To consider them behind, is glory. To consider them before, humility. To lose ground with looking back, vain glory. To be holden, hatred. To turn back, repentance. To be in breath, hope. To be weary, despair. To endeavour to overtake the next, emulation. To supplant or overthrow, envy. To resolve to break through a stop foreseen, courage. To break through a sudden stop, anger. To break through with ease, magnanimity. To lose ground by little hindrances, pusillanimity. To fall on the sudden, is disposition to weep. To see another fall, disposition to laugh. To see one out-gone whom we would not, is pity. To see one out-go we would not, is indignation. To hold fast by another, is to love. To carry him on that so holdeth, is charity. To hurt one's-self for haste, is shame. Continually to be out-gone, is misery. Continually to out-go the next before, is felicity. And to forsake the course, is to die.<sup>21</sup>

[4] I think this is also a good specimen of Hobbes's writing and his general way of looking at human beings. Now, the most striking character of this remarkable passage is the fact that Hobbes is silent on one passion that is very important for him; that passion is fear. Fear does not find a place in this race, in this onward rushing toward glory, superiority, and overcoming others. Fear is, in a way, not a passion. It is, of course, a passion, but a passion with a unique character: *The counter passion*; that in us which stops our desire for dominion, glory, or whatever it may be. Fear, the fear of death, more practically, the fear of violent death, fear of what other human beings can inflict on us, this is *the* fundamental passion from which all moral and political orientation must start. The technical expression of this is that the fear of violent death coincides with the only natural right that each man has. The implication: the fundamental moral and political phenomenon is a right not a duty. All duties are derivative from this fundamental right. This change suggested by Hobbes has been of the

utmost importance for the rest of modern times. The expression "the rights of man," which was coined after Hobbes, has almost completely replaced the older expression "the natural law." To understand this change, one must turn to Hobbes where it appears for the first time. Giving this status to fear means that the strongest passion in man is the fear of violent death, and this is indeed what Hobbes asserts. This strongest passion coincides with man's most rational passion. Here we see the deep optimism in Hobbes: the strongest passion in man should be the one that sobers him, which is the most rational.

The second point that I want to make: Right, virtue, duty, and everything else originates in the individual who primarily, by nature, is under no obligation. Yet obviously, men need authority, something to which the individual must bow. But if the root of all authority is in the individual, the authority can only come from the individual. This thought finds its expression in the concept that Hobbes originated, that the state is a person. No earlier definition defines the state as a person, for Hobbes it is crucial. Person here is understood primarily in the Roman meaning: *persona*, man, the representative. The state is the representative of the individual. In obeying the state, I obey myself. The thought behind this can also be stated as follows: everything that binds man must originate in him and cannot be imposed on him by anything from without, be it God or nature. The full meaning of this was developed after Hobbes, partly by Rousseau, partly by Kant.

The third peculiarity of Hobbes's teaching, the one that is best known, is his doctrine of sovereignty: The sovereign must be absolute; there cannot be any restriction of its power, any restriction of its power, in case of assembly, by any previous laws, by any higher law, or by any contract with one government whatever it may be. It is impossible to appeal to anything higher than the will of the sovereign, which means, and this is crucial, the will of the present sovereign. The will of Henry VII is not binding on Henry VIII. This doctrine that we know in ordinary practice only in the form of the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people is, of course, simply a modification of this. According to the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, the people, and the people alone, is sovereign—sovereign understood here in the popular sense. The force of this great innovation is the notion of power. People had spoken of power at all times, but it had never had any technical precision. In Hobbes, for the first time, it becomes the essential concept.

I want to say a few words about this: The English word “power” conceals a [5] deep ambiguity; it is used to translate two very different Latin terms: *potestas* and *potentia*. *Potestas* is legal power, *potentia* is a mere possibility. In Hobbes power is both; the English word unites what he thought must be brought together, namely, the coincidence of the legitimate with the effected. The legitimate and legal must necessarily coincide with the effected; otherwise, it is not legitimate. *Potestas* is the condition for, but distinguished from, the exercise of that power. If you define the right of the government, you say nothing about how the government should exercise the right. The legal consideration proper disregards the exercise of this right, that falls within the province of prudence, of politics proper, not of law. This means—and one could show it also by considering the other element of power, *potentia*—that power in the Hobbesian sense refers to the means, never to the end. The Hobbesian concept of power implies a certain indifference to the end for which the power is used. The power is, in a way, independent of the end for which it is used or to be used. This means that the concept of power as developed first by Hobbes, implies a shift in orientation from the end to the means, and this had infinite consequences. One of them, the distinction between state and society, is one of the basic principles of our present-day orientation.

Let me mention two other points regarding the concept of power, and I urge you to consider the fact that until Hobbes’s time men were perfectly able to give an account of political things without recourse to “power” in any emphatic sense. Power is, in principle, measurable. You can count the number of H-bombs, battle ships, soldiers, etc., as well as financial power. Second, the term “power” has the peculiar attraction because of its business-like character. When people had spoken of power before, they thought of it much more in terms of dominion, empire, and glory. Here it is easy to discern the element of hybris, of pride, etc. Power, however, does not have this offensive character. Whatever you do, for good or evil purposes, you must have power, and I think a strangely prosaic character of modern life and modern speech is well illustrated by the fact that the term power, as distinguished from empire, etc., has come into general use. So much for a simple enumeration of the peculiarities of power, a concept that has become central in political orientation since Hobbes and through Hobbes. I repeat, the primacy of right compared to duty, the notion of the state as a person, the concept of sovereignty and last but not least, the concept of power.

One further point about the concept of power: Hobbes also said that science is for the sake of power. Thus, the whole theoretical, philosophic enterprise is subordinated by Hobbes to the concern with power. There is nothing said about the use of that power. We all are the heirs to this situation. Today every child knows that science can make us unbelievably powerful, can increase our power, but is wholly unable to tell us anything about the manner in which the power should be used. Now, after having praised Hobbes as highly as I could, I must now turn to the other side and speak of Hobbes’s obscurity. This is not in blame of Hobbes, but merely a reminder of his limitations.

Hobbes’s central argument in the *Leviathan* and elsewhere can be stated as follows: Man is the rational animal, as everyone has said since time immemorial. But now there is a great change: he is not a social animal. Aristotle understood by the rational animal also the social animal. Man is the animal possessing speech and speech points on the one hand to reason and on the other hand to society. For Hobbes, man is a rational animal, but not a social animal. However, what does rational mean? Answer: man is the only animal able to inquire into consequences.

[6] He means by that, men can consider phenomena as causes of possible effects. This kind of thinking is distinguished from that about means that produce an effect imagined. In other words, what a rat is trying to do when it attempts to get out of a cage. There is an effect imagined: freedom. This is common to men and brutes. To use a technical expression: Teleological thinking is common to men and brutes. But given a certain material, playing around with it, as it were, and asking, “what can I do with it?” this is human, and only human. If this is the essence of man—rationality understood in this way—man can also consider himself as the cause of possible effects. He can say: “What am I going to do with my strong arm, with my brain?” Man can consider himself the cause of possible effects, that is to say, he can be aware of his power. The rat that finds a hole is unaware of its power because the reasoning, if you can call it such, is different. The effect—getting out—is imposed, and then he seeks a solution. Here, however, we are concerned with possibility.

Man can be aware of his power. He can, therefore, also be concerned with his power and can aspire to possess power as power. Therefore, he can seek confirmation of his wish to be powerful by being recognized as powerful by others. This is glory, pride, vanity that can then easily take the place of genuine concern with power. For the same reason, man is the



kind of being who can anticipate future danger; he can be haunted by long-range fear. This is the simple nerve of Hobbes's thought from which everything else can easily be deduced, because Hobbes is very good at drawing consequences. Whether the premises are good is another matter. This nerve of Hobbes's argument, however, is never set forth by him clearly and there was no reason, human or divine, why he should not set it forth. This is, in a man of such amazing clarity, quite remarkable. Why is this so? I believe the reason is this: The whole question of the definition of man touches on the problem of whether there is any essential difference between man and brute. The argument I sketched, which Hobbes clearly states, presupposes that there is such an essential difference. But somewhere Hobbes had some reservation that there is such an essential difference. Let me give you an example: When Hobbes speaks of the passions, he says very emphatically in all of his writings that there are some passions peculiar to men, especially those akin to vanity and glory and sense of shame. On the other hand, he also says all passions are common to men and brutes. In this case we can discern another connected issue with this difficulty: If all human passions, including pride and love, are shared by the brutes, then man as a whole is as innocent as the brutes. Surely you can't blame a dog for being vain-glorious. On the other hand, the assertion that there are particularly evil passions peculiar to man implies that man is somehow by nature evil. You can easily see that very grave consequences would flow from whichever of the two premises you adopt. It is easy to see, I think, in Hobbes's teaching, on the one hand, the suggestion that man is very evil and, on the other, that men are not evil at all.

This perplexity regarding the definition of man is reflected in an academic bureaucratic question, namely, the status of political science. Is political science independent of natural science or is it derivative from it? The connection is clear: If man is a being with a character of its own, he is *sui generis*, then political science will necessarily be, at least to some extent, independent of natural science. If, on the other hand, there is no essential difference between man and brute, then political science must, of course, be derivative from natural science. A general doctrine of animal being, called biology, including [7] the psychology of animal beings, supplies a complete outline of human psychology. Hobbes vacillates between these two radically different views. His practice is in favor of the view that political science is independent of natural science; by that I mean the books he wrote.

You have read, I suppose, in the beginning of the *Leviathan* that the book is perfectly intelligible in itself; you don't need to seek explanations elsewhere and Hobbes, one can say, always presents his political science as independent of natural science. But is he able to give an account of this independence? I believe he is not. This is shown already by the fact that he gives various reasons for this separation, reasons that we shall see shortly are not compatible with one another.

On the surface we find the following fundamental distinction: The whole of being is divided into two parts: natural bodies and artificial bodies. Needless to say, this does not justify the distinction between natural and political science because chairs and tables are not as such the subject of political science. We come a bit closer when we consider another distinction, according to which the whole consists of two kinds of bodies: natural bodies and bodies politic and then, of course, bodies politic are radically different from natural bodies; they must be treated by radically different disciplines, political science. Still, somehow Hobbes cannot leave it at that. Therefore, he makes another distinction or rather I should say he makes another distinction on the basis of the perplexity that I will now describe. First, the distinction: the distinction between everything that is into bodies and phantasms. Phantasms, however, is a very nasty word because they are also called thoughts and passions or by Locke they are called ideas. There are bodies and there are ideas. What is meant by these terms, thoughts, ideas, etc., came then to be called the consciousness. The fundamental distinction is that between matter and consciousness. If this is so, it implies that psychology, the science dealing with the consciousness, is *the* fundamental science because we know of bodies only by virtue of the ideas in our mind.

Hobbes makes another distinction according to which the whole is divided into bodies and names, words. By that he means human constructs. Human constructs are by no means the same as ideas. I have not constructed the idea of "blue"; it is just there. Human constructs are made out of ideas, if I may say so, but they are something radically different. Now, there is a science dealing with these constructs and the way to manipulate them properly and this science is called logic. From this point of view, not psychology but logic would be the fundamental science. The great ambiguity: the fundamental science, the first philosophy, is either psychology or logic. This ambiguity has played a very great role in modern thought to the present day. The crucial implication: under no



circumstance is physics or cosmology the fundamental science. This is very strange in a man like Hobbes who always harps on the theme that what is, is truly body and nothing but body. Hobbes tried harder than any man to be a full-fledged materialist, and no materialist ever failed as dismally in being a materialist. Connected with this difference between intention and failure is the perplexity regarding the fundamental science: is it psychology or is it logic?

I now want to mention briefly the fundamental obscurity or perplexity within political philosophy. Hobbes states very sharply against the whole tradition that it is impossible to distinguish between a king and a tyrant, more generally, between a legitimate and illegitimate ruler. The *de facto* ruler, because he is the *de facto* [8] ruler, is the legitimate ruler. His legitimacy is in no way impaired by the manner in which he rules. He can behave like Nero or even worse, but this would in no way detract from his legitimacy and the massive argument to which Hobbes always returns is that it is still better than no government, an argument that is not necessarily a proof. But the difficulty is this: Hobbes is, at the same time, compelled to admit that it is possible to distinguish between a king and a tyrant. He is compelled to do so because he cannot leave it at the sovereign state, the body politic, as a so-called ultimate; no man in his senses can do that. He has to give a reason why you should obey a man. Merely because he is in control? This surely does not create obligation. Then he must go back to the individual, to man as a natural being and find there why *he* should submit. Then he finds his proof, as we know, in the fear of violent death or the concern with self-preservation; but he must go from this natural right of self-preservation to a teaching of natural law, of duties that follow from the right of self-preservation. Now, these duties, refined by the natural law, act necessarily as a standard for distinguishing between a good and a wicked ruler. For example, one provision forbids cruelty, inflicting suffering merely for the fun of it; but if Nero is cruel, it is easily recognized and proved. So you can clearly, legitimately, and rationally say on the basis of Hobbes that he is a tyrant.

Now what does this obscurity bespeak? In the first place Hobbes says that there are criteria of moral judgment independent of positive law. On the other hand, he says there are no criteria of moral judgment independent of positive law. But what is the basis of this perplexity? There are criteria independent of positive law because there is ultimately a natural right, something that is not simply identical with desire. This is the beginning, but this beginning—natural

right as distinguished from desire—is something specifically human that is not of political origin; it is pre-political, of natural origin.

On the other hand, when Hobbes says that there are no criteria of judgment independent of positive law he implies there is nothing but natural bodies and political bodies. In no moral or political matter can you ever go behind the body politic, ultimately the will of the sovereign. When you go beyond that, you have simply chaos where you cannot make any moral or political distinctions. The obscurity that forces Hobbes to assert and deny that it is possible to distinguish between the king and the tyrant is rooted in the more fundamental obscurity concerning the status of man. Is there an essential difference between man and the brutes, or is there no essential difference?

[Question-and-answer section]

[Question inaudible]

**Strauss:** Hobbes did not argue on the basis of any positive law and a constitution is, of course, also a positive law. You can raise the question whether Hobbes would have preferred a federal government or a strictly unitary government, and I think from the trend of his thought he would prefer the more unitary. For the question of business and labor Hobbes would say: what is the objective of the legislator in the first place? Peace and order, impartial law enforcement and this sort [9] of thing. I believe he would be more shocked by the insecurity in Chicago streets than by any steel strike question. Obviously, because no one is in danger of suffering violent death because of certain price differentials, whereas if you cross the Midway or certain other places you might meet violent death or an approximation of it. But to speak of the other duties of government apart from peace and order he says the government should make possible for the citizen to enjoy all sorts of innocent delectations and surely an air conditioner and a refrigerator are innocent delectations. In other words, Hobbes would have been very enthusiastic about the full development of the productive forces of the society and with a deep understanding of the profit motive. I think it is clear that ultimately there are no rights against the government, but you must understand that correctly. The present American government is derivative from the sovereign, the people, and the government is derivative from the people: (1) by the constitution and (2) every administration is, of course, elected. In other words, if you have popular sovereignty, and this cannot be effective except by majority will, there are no rights against the majority will in a democracy and the sovereign people can do to

business and/or labor as they see fit. In no case can they be accused of tyrannical action. The only question is, if it were very restricted. He would say no, it should not be very restricted, but in circumstances where restriction of ordinary freedom seems to be prudent, there is no question about it. In general, Hobbes was infinitely more concerned with religious dissension than with economic dissension. The main point is that the sovereign is the judge in the last resort. The sovereign can establish a single religion and disenfranchise everyone who is not a member of the established church. He can equally disestablish the church and foster a multiplicity of sects. Even if he were Christian by origin, he can make the whole society Muslim. That is the meaning of sovereignty: no strings whatever attached, and you must not forget that the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people ascribes the same rights to the sovereign people, which Hobbes ascribes to the sovereign king. For example, if the sovereign American people were to turn to Islam, there is no constitutional way to prevent it. Hobbes is concerned with the fundamental legal structure and that means for Hobbes primarily the enumeration of those rights, which the sovereign must claim because without them he would cease to be an effective sovereign (i.e., a sovereign). Policy as distinguished from constitutional law was for Hobbes a secondary consideration, although not an important one. One can easily see in which direction it went: a prosperous society, a turning away from religious passion to property.

[...] Hobbes was against all revolution—it involved shooting. He was against civil war and one could even say in fairness to Hobbes, that he was ultimately opposed to foreign wars. Those people who argued later on, on a Hobbesian basis, for outlawing war executed Hobbes's will: Universal security. Hobbes thought security can be maintained only within a state and there he wanted it in full measure. But if someone had shown him a practical way to international security, he would, of course, have accepted it. On his basis it is very hard to see how anyone can be obliged to fight, that is to expose himself to violent death. In one of the most unusual passages in the *Leviathan*, in chapter xxi, Hobbes describes a battle that sounds like a joke, but Hobbes meant it quite seriously. When there is a battle, he says, there is a running away on both sides, but if they do it out of fear and not out of treachery it is perfectly excusable. After all, fear is the basis of the state, how can the state say anything against people acting out of fear? The simple solution is to outlaw war. Of course, to outlaw war, Hobbes

would [10] demand a law-enforcing agency [...]. Hobbes did perhaps more than any other thinker for the development of the modern secular state. The difficulties that arise on the basis of the established secular state were for him secondary considerations and many he didn't even dream of. But as I tried to say at the beginning of my remarks, if we try to understand our society, we cannot reach clarity about the thought that went into it without understanding Hobbes. The view that he is such a wicked man, compared, for example, with John Locke, is not tenable.

[Question about the similarities and differences between Lucretius and Hobbes.]

**Strauss:** This is very simple. As far as the so-called materialism goes and the antireligious impulse, they are identical. There is, as a matter of fact, in one of Hobbes's shorter works a motto taken from Lucretius.<sup>22</sup> More important and more interesting, however, are the differences: Lucretius is not a political philosopher. He is interested in a purely theoretical question: how did political society arise? Not to improve society. Political society is necessary, but a necessary evil. He was not impressed by the mighty Leviathan as was Hobbes. Second, and I think this is perhaps even more important, the solution of the human problem consists in philosophy, purely theoretical philosophy. Philosophy or science in the service of human power is wholly alien to him. For Lucretius, happiness can be achieved only through contentment with the satisfaction of the natural pleasures, no rushing out, no conquest of nature, glory, domination, power, or even charitable technology—technology inspired by the desire to improve the human lot. There is a very radical difference. But to the extent to which the fight against the church was very important to Hobbes, to that extent there was agreement between him and Lucretius. But we must not overlook the differences. Burke has formulated this classically, not speaking of Hobbes in particular, he may have something broader in mind. He said in former times the atheists were quiet and retired. In our time (French Revolution) they have become clamorous and enterprising.<sup>23</sup> Live in retirement! That was an epicurean maxim, whereas Hobbes and men of that kind were political men. Not that they went into politics—they were too cautious for that—but they embarked on a long-range change of opinions that would bring about a change in society. This kind of thing, the influencing of future generations, was wholly absent in the precursors of Hobbes.

[Question inaudible]

**Strauss:** Everyone has by nature the right to self-preservation. That means whatever a man does to preserve his life, mere life, is absolutely necessary. Enlarge that: This right that you claim for yourself applies also to others. In other words, there is an equality of peaceableness that is based on the equality of every human being. Precepts of ordinary decency but with one reservation: if the world is not safe for decency, then no one can be expected to be decent. I am afraid that most of us would in practice agree with him.

[Question inaudible]

**Strauss:** The more interesting case is when you had a Nero. For example, a prince watches a roofer repair a roof. The prince is a bit drunk and says to his servant: "shoot at him, I would like to see how this guy falls down." Is the subject obliged to obey his sovereign? One school said yes, and the sovereign is responsible to God; the [11] other school to which Hobbes belonged, said no. If the king is drunk, or if it is said in some other informal way, it is no command. However, if it is not a mere whim, if it is a formal command, it must be obeyed.

[Question inaudible]

**Strauss:** The passions are natural, not subject to habituation. Men do not have to be told to hate, to love. Let us assume for the moment that man is a being that desires. But if desires are thwarted, there are reactions to it: A child will kick. No one told him to kick. This was the view that men had at all times until Rousseau began to question it, that most of these things are a product of habituation, conditioning.

[Question inaudible]

**Strauss:** You say you don't recognize the Hobbesian man in yourself and those around you, and you say something about these values. Hobbes would simply ask you: "How do you know that they are values?" People in this country or in England or anywhere acquired their values in exactly the same way in which headhunters in the Pacific acquired their values. That the notions of what is right and good that we obtain in society are sound notions one would have to show. This is what Hobbes is trying to do: to enable you to distinguish between the sound and the unsound values, and Hobbes would say that he has proven that head-hunting and things of this sort are wicked, and to be considerate and kind is good.

[Question inaudible]

**Strauss:** The view that all aggressive war is bad is, of course, an absurd idea. Why should a war of aggression be worse than a war of defense? Only if you assume that the state preceding the war was just. But if someone starts a war to redress an existing

unjust state, you cannot call it an unjust war. But in one sense you are right. When you think of individuals, the individual who attacks is the unjust man. Let us take this case: we are defensively minded men, we don't want to take advantage of anyone, but how can you know that the fellow you meet is also a nice guy? Therefore, not knowing him and unable to trust him, you must take precautions. The precaution might be that you shoot on sight. Therefore, Hobbes says in the state of nature no distinction between defense and aggression can be made, but once there is a government the distinction can be made. If someone walking on Michigan Avenue shoots someone because he was afraid of being shot, and the other fellow shows no sign of it, I am afraid no psychiatrist can save him from the electric chair.

**Student:** Was Hobbes influenced by Galileo?

**Strauss:** Yes, he was. Hobbes was unusual in that he matured rather late. If you take the writing of books as a sign of maturity, he finished his first book at fifty-one. We have some specimen of his early thought, when he was about thirty, which gives no indication of his later thought. He awoke in his mid-thirties and this had something to do with his becoming acquainted with mathematics. Then he became immediately familiar with the great movement on the continent connected with Galileo and Descartes, and he saw the infinite possibilities connected with this revolution. According to the legend, it was Galileo who suggested to Hobbes that he apply this movement to politics. This development must have taken place roughly between 1635 and 1640. Because in 1640 we have a book<sup>24</sup> that was not published at the time but was given to a man close to Hobbes. Then there was a great outpouring of important works for the next twenty years, until he was in his seventies, and then he lived another twenty years in which there is no longer any productivity. Galileo was the only man whose mechanical explanation of sense data Hobbes admitted. Descartes, who developed this point much more fully, simply refused to listen [to Hobbes], he was so sure of his supremacy. Hobbes never overcame this resentment. After all, Hobbes did develop a new moral and political teaching; Descartes was much too cautious for that. When Hobbes's book first came out in Latin, people thought Descartes was the author, which was the same movement. In the usual history of philosophy: Descartes the metaphysician, the dualist metaphysician; Hobbes the monistic materialist. But this is not sufficient. It was the same great effort that was started before Galileo by Machiavelli and in which all these great men participated. We must not

forget, for example, Bacon, who did not possess the simple hitting power that Hobbes undoubtedly possessed and for which he is so famous.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes

14. *Phaedrus*, 264b7.
15. Plato, *Republic*, 328a–b.
16. MS. is corrupt here. “indicates” is inserted by the editor.
17. 414e.
18. Plato, *Laws*, 890a8–9.
19. MS. seems corrupt. If Strauss is referring to *Republic* 337d “Plato” should perhaps be replaced by “Glaucón.” Another possibility is that he is referring to *Apology* 38b.
20. The “individual” in the transcript is replaced by “spiritual.”
21. *The Elements of Law*, IX.21.
22. Thomas Hobbes, “An Historical Narration Concerning Heresy, and the Punishment Thereof,” in *English Works*, ed. William Molesworth, vol. 4 (London: John Bohn, 1840), 385.
23. “Boldness formerly was not the character of Atheists as such. They were even of a character nearly the reverse; they were formerly like the old Epicureans, rather an unenterprising race. But of late they are grown active, designing, turbulent, and seditious.” Edmund Burke, “Thoughts on French Affairs,” in *The Works of Edmund Burke*, vol. 3 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1903), 377.
24. *The Elements of Law*.